

**EASTERN REGION/PRICE  
QUALITY IMPROVEMENT COMMITTEE**

**April 17, 2008 11:00 a.m.**

**D.C.F.S. Mammoth Room**

**PRESENT:**

Boni Seals, DCFS Manager  
Heather Ogden, Carbon School District Counselor  
Jeff Olinger, DWS  
John Behn, Boy Scouts of America  
Lisa Branch, Local Interagency Council  
Lisa Shook, DCFS Intake  
Missy Hamilton, Bruin Point Elementary Principal  
Patsy Buchmiller, Regional Healthcare Coordinator  
Rhulinda Sanderson, Parent Advocate  
Shelley Wright, Children's Justice Center Manager

**GENERAL:**

Boni introduced our new member, Patsy Buchmiller. Patsy is the Regional Healthcare Coordinator. She works for the Department of Health and they contract with DCFS.

Kobi needed to be excused today.

**DCFS PROCESS:**

In the last meeting the committee asked Boni for more information about the DCFS system; what does intake do, what needs to be done to make a referral and what referrals are accepted vs. unaccepted. Boni explained the mandatory reporting law in the State of Utah. Utah State law says *any* person in the state of Utah must report child abuse or neglect if they have reason to believe it's happening. They don't need to prove it, that's our job. You just have to have reason to believe it's occurring. It's a misdemeanor if someone is charged with not reporting. When the division completes their investigation a letter is sent out only stating the referral was investigated. There are two kinds of letters. A letter to the community it will say it was investigated. A letter to professionals (schools, medical personnel, etc.) will state if it was supported or unsupported. All information is confidential and can only be shared with law enforcement and the court. We still can't give details of what we found out from the investigation. The judge has to order us to give details. HIPPA doesn't protect a child in an open case. If we want information on the parent we have to get a signed release from them, i.e. a referral of a parent using drugs. Most cases don't go to court. John asked about sharing information. He works with the Boy Scouts of America and is concerned about alleged perpetrators. He wanted to know why they can't access information on supported cases. Boni explained that's been an issue for years; the school districts teachers don't even have access to our database. The only time it would be released is if the person was convicted of a serious crime. It can only be changed by the legislature. Only 1% of the population gets into the sex offender database. Many perpetrators plead their case down to a lesser offense. Discussion was held about school employees. The school runs a BCI check on

their employees, but they don't have access to our system. John suggested talking to Brad King about the concern. There are other people working there that have done well for years who are in our system. John feels we need to weigh on the side of caution.

When a person calls in a referral, physical abuse is one thing we investigate. It's a criminal matter and we have to investigate reports of it. You can spank your child, however you can't leave a mark and it has to be with an open hand. You can't use an object, i.e. spoon because it could be considered a weapon. We also have cases where a 16 year old says FU to the mother and the mother slaps the child we probably wouldn't support on that, but we have to investigate it. Physical abuse needs to be reported right away because DCFS is trained forensically how to investigate. We're aware of where it's common and uncommon for a child to have a bruise. Cigarette burns are physical abuse. Children's bones are hard to break. You get a spiral fracture from twisting. If you see numerous lacerations in the mouth, it could be an indication of physical abuse.

Aggressiveness is another good indicator. Physical neglect isn't criminal. It covers food, clothing and shelter. It weighs the age of child vs. what's going on. If the child is 12 in an extremely dirty home, the child is more capable of taking care of themselves. Many of the homes we go into involving drug abuse, are dirty. When kids come to school and they're dirty we can't open a case on that. Sometimes we take law enforcement to these homes, there may be evidence they're cooking meth. If a child is crawling on a floor and there's feces on the floor or medication within their reach then it's a concern. Fire hazard is another issue for us. Even if the case doesn't go to court the parents know if we supported or unsupported the case. They can ask for an administrative hearing. If we support, we're required to offer them services. They don't have to accept the services.

Regarding sexual abuse, the law states anyone 0-13 years old cannot consent to sex. If you have a 14 year old who has sex with a 13 year old, the 14 year old will be charged with sex abuse. Ages 14-15 can't consent, but they can be charged. It's not a DCFS matter. If they're 16 they can't consent with anyone 10 or more years older. If you're charged with sex abuse of a child, it never goes off your record. If we get a report of two children engaging in a sexual manner we'll open a case as both victims with an unknown perpetrator, because they've learned it from somewhere. **Boni has a sheet for normal or inappropriate sexual behavior.** We have special forensic trained interviewers that interview children. When we interview them, we have to ask questions that no one can say is leading. Missy said the schools don't ask; they call DCFS because they don't want to ruin the case. Boni said what we tell them to listen, don't interrupt, take good notes, don't ask questions and call us. The more a child is interviewed the less credible they are according to the defense attorney. If the parent is an alleged perpetrator we don't have to notify them before interviewing the child. If the perpetrator is out of the home, we'll attempt to notify the parent. John said Camp Directors are encouraged to investigate the allegation and then report it. Boni gave John examples of what would be asked if he were on the stand "So Mr. Behn who forensically trained you to interview a child?" He said they made need to get training for their Counselors. **Brett Platt the director in Provo would be a good trainer. Boni will give John his number.**

Emotional maltreatment is the most difficult to prove, but it's also the most detrimental. We see a lot of adaptive behaviors in these children. Lack of supervision is another allegation that people don't understand. Children can't be left alone in a car even if it's for a minute to run into the store. There's no specific appropriate age to leave a child home alone. With non-supervision we rarely ever support on the first one, but we educate. After that we would support.

Child endangerment is a report of a parent using drugs. One of the strong behavioral indicators is they don't understand what law enforcement does or they're afraid of them. It has to do with safety risk to the child. If they're smoking marijuana, but the child isn't around when they're doing it's a law enforcement issue. If they're smoking meth it's usually an automatic removal because meth residue can be detrimental to the child. Another example was used of a child accessing porn without their parent there, it would be a referral. Heather asked if they have a student that told them they have it at home and hanging on their wall and the parent verified they permitted them to hang it up. Boni said it needs to be called in. CE is the highest reported, DVRCA second highest reported.

Medical neglect is hard to investigate. If you have a child that needs to get an eye exam because they can't see the board, that would be reported under physical neglect. Lisa asked about the parents that have received letters about their child's hearing. Boni said they could make a referral. She asked about putting it in the letter. Boni suggested wording it as a consequence could be. Patsy suggested they cover the self esteem issues first then advise them of possible referrals. John suggested just giving them a list of options. Many families can't afford it.

Regarding education neglect, the legislature has tied our hands on this. If the child has missed 10 consecutive days and/or the school has made reasonable and persistent effort to work with the family with no results, a referral may be made.

Environmental neglect is a condition that poses severe hazard to a child. Maggots, cigarette butts or feces on the floor are an example.

DVRCA is one of the highest forms of abuse in the state. If the child saw or heard or could have seen or could have heard the domestic the parents will be charged with DVRCA. It causes emotional trauma to the children and children have the hardest time getting over it in their lifetime. We were the second state in the nation to incorporate DVRCA five years ago. Other states have followed. Once a referral is called in a time limit starts. Priority 1 means the child is in imminent danger. Priority 2 means the child has to be seen within 24 hours. It could be the perpetrator in the home, or there's physical evidence that needs to be collected. If a child says they're afraid to go home we have to go out on it right away. We have a red tag worker everyday to respond to an emergency. Priority 3 has to be seen in 3 working days. A licensed social worker has to determine if it's a case or not. A referent can be anonymous, but it makes it difficult to get all information needed. Referent information is protected and it can't be subpoenaed in court. Many people tell on themselves. If a person does a GRAMA request anything

related to the referent is redacted. If all we have is a witness statement and that person isn't willing to testify it may mean we can't support the case.

Workers have to learn how to disassociate. That's why we have such a high turnover. Detaching is a learning skill. John said it would be a perfect forum for the educational channel. Most people don't know what we know and how we deal with it. 95% of the sex abuse cases occur by someone they know. Boni will train any school or division that requests it. Everyone could feel the weight in the room. This is why the caseworkers need to learn to detach because it's not good to take that weight home with them.

#### **DCFS STATS:**

Boni handed out the stats of referrals from last year. We accepted 62% and unaccepted 37%. This is pretty normal. Boni explained IHS cases and how we use those. If you're not sure about calling something in, it's good to call it in because then you're establishing a history. John asked about false reporting and Boni explained the law. It's really hard to prove false reporting. She went over the overdue stats. Carbon County does have a problem with it. This doesn't mean we haven't seen the child; it's just that we haven't turned in the paperwork on time. Sometimes law enforcement doesn't investigate the case right away because they're not on the same time restraints we are. If we were unable to complete the investigation, it may have been because the family moved before we could complete the investigation. We can't close it unable to locate, because there's certain criteria that has to be met. With out merit is to be able to say there is no way that this could have ever occurred, i.e. my husband abused my 15 year old daughter and I don't have a 15 year old daughter. Carbon County had 369 accepted cases last year.

Someone asked how many clients can be served in the home. Boni explained the types of cases we open. CIS is the code we use while we're waiting for the court procedure to happen. IHS is when we go out and do an assessment on a home and see if they need services.

Someone had a question about placement stability. At the year end we reduced our foster care cases by 26 children. That's directly related to the intervention and prevention. John asked about homeless children. We rarely get a referral on homeless children. The schools have a different definition of homeless. Jeff said theirs is different as well. We have struggled with placement stability. The federal mandate is 85% and we're at 64%. Placement stability involves kids who are removed that go to more than one place after removal. So if they go to the CJC and then we place them, we haven't met the criteria. Jeff is going to become a foster parent. Heather explained foster parents need 32 hours of training, have to pass a background check, must have four reference letters and pass a physical. A lot of the problem with people going into foster care is they're disillusioned. Lisa said a lot of people feel they can make a difference and with some children no matter how hard you try you're not going to make a difference. For children 11 and under you have to be willing to adopt. John said movie theatres allow public service announcements (PSA) and that would be a good way of getting more foster parents. Boni said we could highlight the adoption exchange database. It's hard in a smaller town. The children have to be free for adoption before we could do that. Kobi is

on the radio station at least 3 times a week. She's trying to talk to the Bishops. John suggested she try LDS Social Services. They were going to have their people train but we don't know if that happened.

Heather asked about the assessment piece. The issue is availability. They can't take crisis cases, because then we'll end up removing them. She's only licensed for 8 children at a time. If she's housing 4 children for us and watching 4, then when there's a crisis she's not available. We need a children's center, youth center and foster parents.

We asked about a marked decline in some areas and the group wanted to know what was needed for the QCR. She highlighted the areas the region was low in. We're actually doing well in Price. QCR doesn't just measure DCFS, it measures the system and how well the system does for the families. It can include the school, DWS, Mental Health, etc.

John suggested we send a letter to all the ecclesiastical leaders about our need for foster families. Boni will type a letter for the foster parents and then for that. The Parrot Heads is another group we could go to. Missy said we hear about the one bad case vs. the 74 good cases and that's part of the problem with getting foster parents. Foster care doesn't pay for day care. John asked about Rebecca Mason who's over the RSVP. They don't want to work with little children.

**NEXT MEETING: June 19<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 – 1:00 p.m. Lunch will be served.**